

Press Room



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California Puts the Brakes on Impaired Driving

More than 310 Agencies Take Part in Sobriety Checks in December

Sacramento, Calif.— There will be no holiday for the State's law enforcement community later this month as agencies statewide prepare for a concentration of sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols aimed at deterring impaired driving and removing drunk drivers from California roadways. Funded in part by federal grants from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) through the Business, Transportation & Housing Agency (BT&H), the concentrated efforts planned to coincide with December's annual Drunk and Drugged Driving (3D) Prevention Month will include the California Highway Patrol and local law enforcement agencies across the state.

Nationally and statewide, fatalities in alcohol-related crashes are on the rise. With California experiencing an increase in alcohol-related crashes for the fourth consecutive year after more than a decade of decline, the State isn't taking this trend lightly.

"The Highway Patrol is very concerned about the increase in impaired driving," said CHP Commissioner D.O. "Spike" Helmick. "We want people to know that it's a serious call to motorists not to drink and drive. I can assure you a DUI is not a pleasant experience and it can affect the rest of your life."

Why the tough stance? Despite tireless efforts by law enforcement to stop drunk and drugged driving, many people mistakenly continue to dismiss impaired driving as if it were a minor offense.

"The Schwarzenegger Administration has made impaired driving a top priority for traffic safety funding to better enable local law enforcement to do their job," said BT&H Secretary, Sunne Wright McPeak. "By working together, we can lessen the economical and societal impacts of impaired driving."

Part of California's solution involves the expansion of a model which began in Santa Clara County in the 1970's, known as 'Avoid', which brings multiple law enforcement agencies together to conduct regional sobriety checkpoints, patrols and coordinated public information. The 'Avoid' program covers most of the state, with more than 310 agencies slated to participate

in regional DUI-prevention efforts this month.

“The goal of the Avoid programs is really to act as a deterrent,” said McPeak. “Studies conducted in California and across the nation all show that extensive checkpoint activity results in a substantial reduction in alcohol-related crashes, injuries and deaths in the communities in which they are held. It’s all about saving lives.”

In 2002, 1,416 people were killed and 32,041 injured in alcohol-related crashes in California, up from 1,308 fatalities and 31,806 injuries in 2001.

In observation of Drunk and Drugged Driving (3D) Prevention Month, the OTS and CHP, along with the California Restaurant Association, encourage Californians to not only celebrate responsibly by using designated drivers, but also making sure they wear seat belts on each and every ride.

Here are some common sense tips for enjoying the holiday season safely:

- Always have a designated driver on hand whenever alcohol is served.
- Never serve alcohol to minors. California has a zero tolerance policy that will be enforced.
- Talk to young people about the dangers and consequences of impaired driving.
- Provide non-alcoholic beverages at holiday celebrations.
- Think about the evening in advance. Decide on your choice of alternatives before you go.

*Statistics based on California Highway Patrol 2002 provisional data.